

MAINE PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT NETWORK SYSTEM



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*****ADVISORY – Important Information*****

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TO: All HAN Recipients

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SUBJECT: H1N1 Preparations for Residential Schools

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Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC)
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H1N1 Preparations for Residential Schools

August 3, 2009

The purpose of this health advisory is to provide some guidance for residential schools on how to prepare for H1N1, based on preliminary lessons we have learned from the recent outbreaks in summer residential camps.

Maine Summer Camp Outbreak Overview

Out of 137 summer residential youth camps, Maine CDC, Maine's state public health agency, has identified H1N1 from mid-June through late July in 36 camps, which represents 26% of all these camps.

Thus far, no camp has had to close. No campers or staff have been seriously ill or required hospitalization. Very few campers have returned home, in part because discharge would have required long-distance travel with potential exposure to others, and in part because the camps were prepared to care for them.

There are two overarching lessons we have learned thus far from these summer camp outbreaks. First, these camps have shown us the importance of preparation. Despite H1N1 outbreaks, camps have continued to successfully offer a fulfilling and safe Maine camp experience to thousands of youth from across the country and the world. This is primarily because these camps took steps ahead of time to prepare.

The second overarching lesson is how highly transmissible H1N1 appears to be in a youth camp setting. As one camp director commented, "We were very prepared for the virus, but were unprepared for the sheer numbers of campers affected. A typical health center is not built to cope with seeing dozens of campers with influenza like illness per day." Some camps have anecdotally reported up to 30 – 40% of campers affected, including several camps with well over 50 campers and staff in isolation for several days.

Camps generally used similar strategies to prepare for and address outbreaks of H1N1. They included: communication; prevention; early detection; isolation with maintenance of operations; and treatment. These strategies appear to have implications for other settings, especially for universities, colleges, and other residential schools.

Residential School Recommendations

The recommendations for residential schools contained in this advisory emanate from interviews and correspondence with camp directors, their medical staff, and relevant Maine CDC staff.

These recommendations for residential schools are also meant to complement the U.S. CDC's school guidance (<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/>), which may be updated later this month, and the federal pandemic flu preparation checklists for colleges (<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/school/collegeschecklist.html>). We recommend that your school follow the guidance in these two federal documents as well.

Feel free to contact us at Maine CDC with any questions or concerns you have. Since many of you may have similar questions, feel free to join us on a **conference call on Monday August 10th at 12 noon.** **The call-in number is 1-800-914-3396 and the participant pass code is 473623.** If you have specific questions you would like addressed on this phone call, feel free to email them to tara.thomas@maine.gov. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions on the call itself.

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Consider sending a team to the **Maine H1N1 Summit on Thursday August 20th at the Augusta Civic Center**. There will be opportunities to learn more about H1N1, efforts to mitigate its effects in Maine, and to discuss specific challenges you may be facing. Online registration is available at <http://www.mcdregistration.org/signup.asp?ID=172>, and the cost per person is only \$15 for the day, which includes lunch and snacks.

Interim Recommendations for Residential School Settings
Emanating from Experiences with H1N1 Outbreaks in Maine Summer Camps

Maine CDC/DHHS, August 3, 2009

Communication:

- Establish communication systems on H1N1 with parents, students, and staff early, especially via email and phone. Let them know ahead of time what your plans entail and what they can expect to happen when H1N1 appears. Keep them well informed of the presence and progress of H1N1-related activities on campus.
- Assure there is surge capacity in communication channels and/or that alternative communication channels such as cell phones are established in case land lines and websites become jammed.
- Establish communication links with the state (or local if that is appropriate) public health agency before the start of school, including email and phone contact information. Make sure at least one of these is a 24 hour link.
- Establish a link with the local and/or county emergency management agency, especially to assess the availability of and how to access supplies that could be needed, such as cots and blankets.
- Prepare for parents, staff, students, students' own health care providers, and others to question your strategies and to ask for the sources of information you are using to make decisions. For instance, consider creating a webpage with links to your information sources.

Prevention:

- During orientation teach respiratory hygiene and shared responsibility to adhere to it. Examples include: teaching hygienic sneezing and coughing techniques; assuring hand sanitizer and tissues are easily available; and displaying posters with reminders about good hand-washing, sneezing and coughing etiquette, and staying isolated if ill. Some materials such as videos ("Why Don't We Do It In Our Sleeves") and posters can be found on Maine CDC's website at: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/swine-flu-2009.shtml>.
- Stock up on prevention tools before the start of school. Examples include hand sanitizer, tissues, and posters.
- Ask students who have recently been ill to arrive late for school without penalty.
- Consider implementing some social distancing measures such as rearranging dormitory beds to create larger distances between students, especially their faces.

Early Detection:

- Consider purchasing extra thermometers and personal protective equipment such as masks, respirators, and gloves before school begins.
- Consider active surveillance by daily prompting of newly arriving students or students exposed to someone with H1N1 to report any fevers or other symptoms.
- Once an outbreak of H1N1 is identified on campus, and unless seasonal influenza or another illness with similar symptoms is circulating in the community, PCR testing of additional students or staff with symptoms is of little benefit. The action steps are likely to be the same regardless of the test result.
- Report a possible outbreak and/or obtain guidance on testing and management from Maine CDC's clinical consultation toll free 24-hour phone line at 1-800-821-5821.

Isolation:

- At this point in time, the US CDC's recommendations are for those with symptoms (regardless of test result, unless there is a positive test result for a non-H1N1 illness such as strept throat) to be isolated for 7 days or 24 hours without symptoms, whichever is longer. Maintaining people in isolation for several days after they are recovered from symptoms was quite challenging for summer camps. Check Maine and US CDC's websites for any possible changes to these recommendations.
- Identify and set up places ahead of time for isolation so ill students can immediately be isolated. If the infirmary is the first isolation location, make sure students with H1N1 are seen and isolated separately from other infirmary patients.
- Make arrangements for rooms of an ill student to be cleaned as soon as the student is identified and isolated, if the student shares a room with another student.
- Prepare for how to feed, provide toilet facilities, and health care for potentially large numbers of mostly mildly ill students needing isolation. Determine how classes will be made up for large numbers of isolated students.
- Since pregnant women, those with severe asthma, and those with a few other conditions and of certain ages appear to be at especially high-risk for complications due to H1N1, assure staff and students who fit these criteria are provided information and support for protecting themselves. (See US CDC's H1N1 website for the full list of conditions.)

Treatment:

- Identify those students at high risk for complications before the start of school.
- Make arrangements for obtaining antiviral medications for those who are at high risk for complications if they become ill or are exposed to H1N1. These arrangements should include plans for obtaining medications during non-business hours, such as holidays and evenings.

Vaccination:

- Arrange for seasonal influenza vaccine to be offered to students and staff, especially those at high risk for complications, in September or as soon as possible when the vaccine is available.
- Prepare for offering H1N1 influenza vaccine to all students and staff once it becomes available, which may be as early as mid-October. This will require the school to be able to receive this free vaccine from the Maine CDC as well as to arrange for it to be administered to all students and staff in a timely manner. Maine CDC anticipates posting on its website soon the agreement needed for vaccine receipt, which will require a licensed health care provider and a reliable refrigerator. Administration may require partnering with local health care providers.

Stay Informed:

- Send a team to the Maine H1N1 Summit on August 20th at the Augusta Civic Center. Online registration is available at <http://www.mcdregistration.org/signup.asp?ID=172>.
- Sign up to receive urgent updates from Maine CDC's Health Alert Network (HAN). The easiest and quickest way is to sign up is through the HAN Alert RSS feed at www.mainepublichealth.gov (midway down the center of the homepage).
- Check the Wednesday updates on H1N1 in Maine on Maine CDC's H1N1 website: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/swine-flu-2009.shtml>.
- Consider following Maine CDC's updates and other information on Face Book (search for "Maine CDC"), Twitter (<http://twitter.com/MEPublicHealth>), My Space (www.myspace.com/mainepublichealth), and/or Maine CDC's Blog (<http://mainepublichealth.blogspot.com/>).
- For clinical consultation, outbreak management guidance, and reporting of an outbreak of H1N1 call Maine CDC's toll free 24-hour phone line at: 1-800-821-5821.
- Check for possible updated U.S. CDC H1N1 guidance for schools later this month.
- Other Website Resources:
U.S. CDC H1N1: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>
U.S. CDC H1N1 School Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/>
Federal Pandemic Flu Checklist for Colleges: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/school/collegeschecklist.html>
Maine CDC H1N1: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/swine-flu-2009.shtml>
Maine Department of Education H1N1: <http://www.maine.gov/education/h1n1/index.html>